Muhammad al-Mahdi

(Peace be Upon him)

Name: Muhammad.
Title: al-Mahdi, al-Qa'im, al-Hujjah, al-Gha'ib, Sahibu'z-Zaman, Sahibu 'l-Amr.
Agnomen: Abu'l-Qasim.
Father's name: al-Hasan al-'Askari.
Mother's name: Narjis.
Birth: In Samarra', on Friday, 15th Sha'ban 255 AH.

He is still living and will appear before the end of the world. Minor Occultation: 8th Rabi 'u 'l-awwal 260 AH. Major Occultation: 10th Shawwal 329 AH.
There Existed a good deal of harmony and uniformity between the aspects pertaining to the births of Prophet Muhammad, the last Apostle of Allah and Imam al-Mahdi, the last Apostolic Imam. Just as the coming of the Holy Prophet was prophesied well in advance by the preceding prophets, similarly the impending news of the gracious birth of Imam al-Mahdi was foretold by the Holy Prophet. Innumerable traditions in this context, quoted right from the Holy Prophet, from the glowing contents of many books of Masanid, Sihah and Akhbar, and of Shi'ite scholars ('ulama') existed Many Sunni scholars have accumulated these traditions in complete volumes also, e.g.: al-Bayan fi akhbar Sihibi'z-Zaman by al-Hafiz Muhammad ibn Yusuf ash-Shafi'i and Dhikriyyatu'l-Mahdi by al-Hafiz Abu Nu'aym al-Isfahani as well as as-Sahih of Abu Dawud and as-Sunan of Ibn Majah.
All of the above books record the traditions bearing evidence of the coming of this Holy Imam. The promised Mahdi, who is usually mentioned by his title of Imamu'l-'Asr (the Imam of the Period) and Sahibu 'z-Zaman (the Lord of the Age), is the son of the Eleventh Imam. His name is the same as that of the Holy Prophet. He was born in Samarra' in 255/869 and until 260/874 when his father was martyred, lived under his father's care and tutelage. He was hidden from public view and only a few of the elite among the Shi'ah were able to meet him. After the martyrdom of his father he became Imam and by Divine Command went into occultation (ghaybah). Thereafter, he appeared only to his deputies (na'ib) and even then only in exceptional circumstances.
The Imam chose as a special deputy for a time 'Uthman ibn Sa'id al-'Amri, one of the companions of his father and grandfather who was his confident and trusted friend. Through his deputy the Imam would answer the demands and questions of the Shi'ah. After 'Uthman ibn Sa'id, his son Mutammad ibn 'Uthman al-'Amri was appointed the deputy of the Imam. After the death of Muhammad ibn 'Uthman, Abu'l-Qasim al-Husayn ibn Ruh an-Nawbakhti was the special deputy, and after his death 'Ali ibn Muhammad as-Samuri was chosen for this task. A few days before the death of 'Al; ibn Muhammad as-Samuri in 329/939 an order was issued by the Imam stating that in six days 'Ali ibn Muhammad as-Samuri would die. Henceforth the special deputation of the Imam would come to an end and the major occultation (ghaybatu 'l-kubrd) would begin and would continue until the day God grants permission to the Imam to manifest himself.

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The occultation of the Twelfth Imam is, therefore, divided into two parts: the first, the minor occultation (ghaybatu's-sughra) which began in 260/872 and ended in 329/939, lasting about seventy years; the second, the major occultation which commenced in 329/939 and will continue as long as God wills it. In a hadith upon whose authenticity everyone agrees, the Holy Prophet has said, "If there were to remain in the life of the world but one day, God would prolong that day until He sends in it a man from my community and my household. His name will be the same as my name. He will fill the earth with equity and justice as it was filled with oppression and tyranny." On the Appearance of the Mahdi: In the discussion on prophecy and the Imamate it was indicated that as a result of the law of general guidance which governs all of creation, man is of necessity endowed with the power of receiving revelation through prophecy, which directs him toward the perfection of the human norm and the well-being of the human species. Obviously, if this perfection and happiness were not possible for man, whose life possesses a social aspect, the very fact that he is endowed with this power would be meaningless and futile. But there is no futility in creation. In other words, ever since he has inhabited the earth, man has had the wish to lead a social life filled with happiness in its true sense and has striven toward this end. If such a wish were not to have an objective existence it would never have been imprinted upon man's inner nature, in the same way that if there were no food there would have been no hunger. Or, if there were to be no water there would be no thirst and if there were to be no reproduction there would have been no sexual attraction between the sexes. Therefore, by reason of inner necessity and determination, the future will see a day when human society will be replete with justice and when all will live in peace and tranquillity, when human beings will be fully possessed of virtue and perfection. The establishment of such a condition will occur through human hands but with Divine succour. And the leader of such a society, who will be the saviour of man, is called in the language of the hadith, the Mahdi .

In the different religions that govern the world such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, Zoroastrian-ism and Islam there are references to a person who will come as the saviour of mankind. These religions have usually given happy tidings of his coming, although there are naturally certain differences in detail that can be discerned when these teachings are compared carefully. The hadith of the Holy Prophet upon which all Muslims agree, "The Mahdi is of my progeny," refers to this same truth. There are numerous hadiths cited in Sunni and Shi'ite sources from the Holy Prophet and the Imams concerning the appearance of the Mahdi, such as that he is of the progeny of the Prophet and that his appearance will enable human society to reach true perfection and the full realization of spiritual life. In addition, there are numerous other traditions concerning the fact that the Mahdi is the son of the Eleventh Imam, Hasan al-'Askari.

They agree that after being born and undergoing a long occultation the Mahdi will appear again, filling with justice the world that has been corrupted by injustice and iniquity. As an example, 'Ali ibn Musa ar-Rida (the Eighth Imam) said, in the course of a hadith, "The Imam after me is my son, Muhammad, and after him his

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son 'Ali, and after 'Ali his son, Hasan, and after Hasan his son Hujjatu'l- Qa'im, who is awaited during his occultation and obeyed during his manifestation. If there remain from the life of the world but a single day, Allah will extend that day until he becomes manifest, and fill the world with justice in the same way that it had been filled with iniquity. But when? As for news of the 'hour,' verily my father told me, having heard it from his father who heard it from his father who heard it from his ancestors who heard it from 'Ali, that it was asked of the Holy Prophet, 'Oh Prophet of God, when will the "support" (al-Qa'im) who is from thy family appear? ' He said, 'His case is like that of the Hour (of the Resurrection).
He alone will manifest it at its proper time. It is heavy in the heavens and the earth. It cometh not to you save unawares (7:187)
Saqr ibn Abi Dulaf said, "I heard from Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn 'Ali ar-Rida (the Ninth Imam) who said, 'The Imam after me is my son, 'Ali; his command is my command; his word is my word; to obey him is to obey me. The Imam after him is his son, Hasan. His command is the command of his father; his word is the word of his father; to obey him is to obey his father.' After these words the Imam remained silent.' I said to him, 'Oh son of the Prophet, who will be the Imam after Hasan?' The Imam cried hard, then said, 'Verily after Hasan his son is the awaited Imam who is "al-Qa'im bi'l-haqq" (He who is supported by the Truth)."
Musa ibn Ja'far Baghdadi said, "I heard from Imam Abu Muhammad al-Hasan ibn 'Ali (the Eleventh Imam) who said, I see that after me differences will appear among you concerning the Imam after me. Whose accepts the Imams after the Prophet of God but denies my son is like the person who accepts all the prophets but denies the prophethood of Muhammad, the Prophet of God, upon whom be peace and blessing. And whose denies (Muhammad) the Prophet of God is like one who has denied all the prophets of God, for to obey the last of us is like obeying the first and to deny the last of us is like denying the first. But beware! Verily, for my son there is an occultation during which all people will fall into doubt except those whom Allah protects."
The opponents of Shi'ism protest that according to the beliefs of this school the Hidden Imam should by now be nearly twelve centuries old, whereas, this is impossible for any human being. In answer it must be said that the protest is based only on the unlikelihood of such an occurrences not its impossibility. Of course, such a long lifetime or a life of a longer period is unlikely. But those who study the hadiths of the Holy Prophet and the Imams will see that they refer to this life as one possessing miraculous qualities. Miracles are certainly not impossible nor can they be negated through scientific arguments. It can never be proved that the causes and agents that are functioning in the world are solely those that we see and know and that other causes which we do not know or whose effects and actions we have not seen nor understood do not exist. It is in this way possible that in one or several members of makind there can be operating certain causes and agents which bestow upon them a very long life of a thousand or several thousand years. Medicine has not even lost hope of discovering a way to achieve very long life spans. In any case, such protests from "Peoples of the Book" such as Jews, Christians and Muslims are most

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strange for they accept the miracles of the prophets of God according to their own sacred scriptures.
The opponents of Shi'ism also protest that, although Shi'ism considers the Imam necessary in order to expound the injunctions and verities of religion and to guide the people, the occultation of the Imam is the negation of this very purpose, for an Imam in occultation who cannot be reached by mankind cannot be in any way beneficial or effective. The opponents say that if God wills to bring forth an Imam to reform mankind, He is able to create him at the necessary moment and does not need to create him thousands of years earlier.
In answer it must be said that such people have not really understood the meaning of the Imam, for in the discussion on the Imamate it became clear that the duty of the Imam is not only the formal explanation of the religious sciences and exoteric guidance of the people. In the same way that he has the duty of guiding men outwardly, the Imam also bears the function of walayah and the esoteric guidance of men. It is he who directs man's spiritual life and orients the inner aspect of human action toward God. Clearly, his physical presence or absence has no effect in this matter. The Imam watches over men inwardly and is in communion with the soul and spirit of men even if he be hidden from their physical eyes. I{is existence is always necessary even if the time has not as yet arrived for his outward appearance and the universal reconstruction that he is to bring about.
al-Imam al-Hujjah, peace be Upon him, said:
Rest assured that no one has a special relation- ship with Allah. Whoever denies me is not my (follower). The appearance of the Relief (al-faraj) depends solely upon Allah; therefore, those who propose a certain time for it are liars. As to the benefit of my existence in Occultation, it is like the benefit of the sun behind clouds where the eyes do not see. Indeed, my existence is an amnesty for the people of the earth.-Pray much to Allah to hasten the Relief, for therein also lies the release from your sufferings.
(A Brief History of The Fourteen Infallibles, p. 159-166)

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The Twelfth Imam Hazrat Mahdi (A.S.)

The Imam, the just Guide, Hazrat Mahdi (A.S.) was born half-way through the month of Sha'ban in the year 255 A.H. in the town of Samarra, and in 260 A.H., when his great father died, he reached the exalted position of the Imamate. His name (Muhammad) and his agnomen (Abu'l-Qasim) are the same as the Prophet's. His father, the 11th Shi'a Imam, was Hazrat Imam Hasan al-'Askari (A.S.), and his mother, the great lady Nargis. For various reasons, the twelfth Imam, from the first day of his life, did not appear publicly, and for about seventy years people were in communication with him through the intermediary of his special representatives, in order of succession: 'Uthman ibn Sa'id, Muhammad ibn 'Uthman, Husayn ibn Ruh, and 'Ali ibn Muhammad as-Samarri. This period of seventy years is known as the minor occultation (al-ghaybat as-sughra), and at the end of that period the major occultation (al-ghaybat al-kubra) began. During the major occultation till the time of his reappearance, no one has been his special representative, and there will be no one in the future, and the people

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have the duty to refer to the fuqaha, those excelling in knowledge of the shari'ah, and the narration of hadith who are specialised in the matters of the religion.

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Belief in Hazrat Mahdi, and Universal Reform.

The belief in the reappearance of the expected Mahdi (A.S.)the universal reformer is not confined to the Shi'ite Muslims. Other Islamic groups and even non-Islamic groups like the Jews and the Christians and some of the great world intellectual figures believe in the appearance of a great spiritual reformer. In Psalm 37 is written: "...Trust in the Lord and do good; so you will dwell in the land, and enjoy security. ...For the wicked shall be cut off: but those who wait for the Lord shall possess the land. ...But the weak shall possess the land, and delight themselves in abundant prosperity. ...The Lord knows the days of the flawless, and their heritage will abide forever. ...For those blessed by the Lord, shall possess the land, but those cursed by Him shall be cut off. ...The righteous shall possess the land, and dwell upon it at peace for ever..."

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The Qur'an and belief in al-Mahdi

In the Qur'an a time is promised when the worshippers of Truth, the world's people of righteousness, will take over the power and government of the world, and the glorious din of Islam will reign all over the earth. Other ayahs have been revealed which exegetically point to Hazrat Mahdi (A.S.).

"For We have written in the Psalms, after the Remembrance, 'The earth shall be the inheritance of My righteous servants." (XXI; 105)

"Allah has promised those of you who believe and do righteous deeds that He will surely make you successors in the land, even as He made those who were before them successors, and that He will surely establish their religion for them, and will give them in exchange, after their fear, security: They shall serve Me, not associating with Me anything. " (XXIV:55)

"It is He Who has sent His Messenger with the religion of truth, that he may lift it above every religion, though the unbelievers be averse. (LXI:9)

"Yet We desired to be gracious to those that were abased in the land, and to make them leaders, and to make them the inheritors. " (XXII:5)

The above ayahs clearly show that in the end the world will fall to the hands of Allah's worthy and righteous servants and that they will become the leaders of the people of the world. Then Islam will be victorious over all religions.

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Belief in al-Mahdi and the Sunni authorities

In this subject, the scholars in the Sunni school have related many hadiths from the Prophet of Islam, through narrators whom they themselves trust. From among them are such hadiths as tell that the Imams are twelve persons and that are all from the Quraysh. Al-Mahdi(A.S.), the promised one, is from the family of the Prophet and is a descendent of Hazrat 'Ali and Hazrat Fatimah Zahra (A.S.), and in many of these hadiths it is mentioned that he is from the line of Imam Husayn (A.S.). They have mentioned and recorded hundreds of hadiths about the Mahdi in more than seventy books by their valued and dependable authorities of which we shall mention a few examples. al-Musnad of Ahmad ibn

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Hanbal (d. 241 A.H.) Sahih of al-Bukhari (d. 256 A.H.) Sahih of Muslim ibn Hajjaj Nishabouri (d. 261 A.H.) Sunan of Abu Dawud Sajistani (d. 275 A.H.) Sahih of Muhammad ibn 'Isa at-Tirmidhi (d. 279 A.H.) The authors of the above books - each one of them among the most authoritative books of the Sunnis - died either before the birth of the Imam of the Age (225 A.H.) or shortly after his birth. Let us also mention: - Masabih as-Sunnah of al-Baghawi (d. 516 A.H.) Jami' al-Usul of ibn al-Athir (d. 606 A H.) Al-Futuhat al-Makkiyyah of Muhyi'd-din ibn 'Arabi (d.638 A.H.) Tadhkirat al-Khawass of Sibt ibn al-Jawzi (d. 654 A.H.) Fara'd as-Simtayn of al-Hamawi (d. 716 A.H.) as-Sawa'iq al-Muhriqah of Ibn Hajar al-Haytami (d. 973 A.H.) Yanabi'al-Mawaddah of Shaykh Sulayman al-Qunduzi (d.1293 A.H.) Some of the Sunni scholars have written books especially about the Imam of the Age:

1. Al-Bayan fi Akhbar Sahib az-Zaman of Al-Ganji ash-Shafi'i 2. 'Iqd ad-Durar fi Akhbar al-Imam al-Muntazar of Shaykh Jamalu'd-din Yusuf al-Dimashqi 3. Mahdi Al ar-Rasul of 'Ali ibn Sultan Muhammad al-Harawi al-Hanafi 4. Kitab al-Mahdi of Abu Dawud 5. 'Alamat al-Mahdi of Jalalu'd-din as-Suyuti 6. Manaqib al-Mahdi of Hafiz Abu Nu'aim al-lsfahani 7. Al -Qawl al -Mukhtasar fi 'Alamat al -Mahdi 8. al-Muntazar of Ibn Hajar 8. Al-Burhan fi 'Alamat Mahdi Akhir az-Zaman of Mulla 'Ali al-Muttaqi 9. Arba'un Hadith fi al-Mahdi of Abu'l-A' la'al-Hamadani

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The Hidden Reformer

We have at hand more than three thousand hadiths from the Prophet (S.A.) and from the pure Imams about the Imam of the Age. From them it is clear that the Imam of the Age is the ninth son of Husayn ibn 'Ali (A.S.), his father is Hazrat Imam Hasan 'Askari (A.S.), his mother Nargis Khatun. His name is the same as that of the Prophet of the end of time, his title is al-Mahdi. It was to happen that he would be born during his father's lifetime in Samarra, that his father would die when he was young, that he would live even to this day, and as long as God wished it. Then he will reappear and the world will be filled with justice at a time when there is injustice everywhere and that is why he is now hidden from the sight of men. And when he comes with his back towards the Ka'bah's edifice, he will lean against the wall and cry out and call for his followers, who will number 313 persons. Hazrat 'Isa (A.S.) will come from the heaven down to the earth, and will pray in a prayer led by al-Mahdi. The Imam of the Age will cause the commands of Islam to reach all over the world, and the earth will be like paradise.

There are very many hadiths related by the Shi'a and Sunni scholars on many aspects connected with this great Imam, and these are mentioned in books like Bihar al-Anwar and Muntakhab al-Athar. First we shall indicate here some of these hadiths which the author of Muntakhab al-Athar wrote down in his book and then we shall give the text of some of them. The total amount of hadiths

1. A hadith in which it is related that the Imams are twelve, the first being 'Ali, the last being al-Mahdi (A.S.) (No. of hadith: 58)

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2. A hadith which give news of the appearance of al-Mahdi(A.S.). (No. of hadith: 657)

3. A hadith which identify him as descendent of the Prophet (S.A.). (No. of hadith: 389)

4. A hadith which say that his name and agnomen are the same as the Prophet's. (No. of hadith: 48)

5. A hadith which say al-Mahdi is a descendent of Amir al-Muminin(A.S.). (No. of hadith: 214)

6. A hadith which say he is a descendent of Hazrat Fatimah (A.S.) (No. of hadith: 192)

7. A hadith which say he is a descendent of Hazrat Husayn (A.S.) (No. of hadith: 185)

8. A hadith which say he is the ninth descendent of Imam Husayn (A.S.) (No. of hadith: 148)

9. A hadith which say he is a descendent of Imam Zayn al-'Abidin (A.S.) (No. of hadith: 185)

10. A hadith which say he is a descendent of Imam Baqir (A.S.) (No. of hadith: 103)

11. A hadith which say he is a descendent of Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (AS.) (No. of hadith: 103)

12. A hadith which say he is a descendent of Imam Musa Kazim (A.S.) (No. of hadith: 101)

13. A hadith which say he is a descendent of Imam Rida (A.S.) (No. of hadith: 95)

14. A hadith which say he is a descendent of Imam Jawad (A.S.) (No. of hadith: 90)

15. A hadith which say he is a descendent of Imam Hadi (A.S.) (No. of hadith: 90)

16. A hadith which say he is a descendent of Imam Hasan al-'Askari (A.S.) (No. of hadith: 146)

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17. A hadith which say that the name of his father is Hasan(A.S.) (No. of hadith: 147)

18. A hadith which say that he will fill the world with justice (No. of hadith: 123)

19. A hadith which say his occultation will be prolonged (No. of hadith: 91)

20. A hadith which relate the extent of al-Mahdi's life (No. of hadith: 318)

21. A hadith which say that Islam will rule over the world through him (No. of hadith: 47)

22. A hadith which say he will be the twelfth and the last Imam. (No. of hadith: 136)

When looking at the above mentioned and other hadiths, it should be kept in mind that the hadiths mentioning al-Mahdi (A.S.) have been narrated most frequently, and that there are few subjects in Islam which have been mentioned in hadiths so often. Thus, in this light, anyone who believes in Islam and its Prophet (S.A.) must necessarily declare his belief in the existence of the promised al-Mahdi who is now in occultation. Now we shall relate some of these hadiths.

1. The author of Yanabi' al-Mawaddah relates that the Prophet (S.A.) said: "A1-Mahdi is a descendent of mine. He will be in concealment, and when he manifests himself, the earth will become filled with justice, just as it was previously filled with injustice."

2. In this book it is also related that Salman al-Farsi said: "I went to the Prophet, when Husayn ibn 'Ali was sitting in his lap and the Prophet was kissing his eyes and mouth, and he said: 'You are a noble one, the son of a noble one, and the brother of a noble one; you are the Imam, the son of the Imam, and the brother of the Imam. Your are the Proof, son of the Proof and the brother of the Proof; you will be the father of nine Proofs of whom the ninth will be the Qa'im."

3. Ibn Abi Dalaf says: "I heard from Hazrat 'Ali ibn Muhammad (the 10th Imam) that he said: 'The Imam after me will be Hasan, my son, and after him his descendent the Qa'im, who will fill the earth with justice, when it was previously filled with injustice.

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4. Hudhayfah said that the Prophet (S.A.) said: "If no more than one day is left of the world, Allah will make that day so long that a man, descendent of mine, whose name is my name, will appear." Salman asked: "O Prophet of Allah, which descendent will he be?" The Prophet put his hand on Husayn and said that he would be one of his descendents.

5. Mas'adah relates from Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (A.S.) that he said: "The Qa'im will be born of Hasan (the 11th Imam, Hazrat Imam Hasan al-'Askari), and Hasan will be son of 'Ali (the tenth Imam, Hazrat Imam 'Ali al-Naqi), and 'Ali will be son of Muhammad (the ninth Imam, Hazrat Imam Muhammad at-Taqi), and Muhammad will be born of 'Ali (the eighth Imam, Hazrat 'Ali ibn Musa ar-Rida) and 'Ali will be son of this child (he pointed to Hazrat Musa ibn Ja'far, the seventh Imam). We are twelve Imams, all pure and of a noble birth. I swear by Allah, if there remains of the world no more than one day, Allah will make that day so long that the Qa'im of us, the Husehold of the Prophet (S.A.), will appear."

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The Opinion of Sociologists

The world's foremost intellectuals are of the opinion that the wars, massacres, murders, prostitution, and all the evils of this age which are daily in the increase are because there is no equilibrium between man's material and spiritual requirements. The man of today has turned his back on moral virtues and spiritual riches, although he has conquered the sea, the desert and space, and has taken himself to the moon. It is obvious that by relying in force and power he cannot establish order and justice in the world, and that only with technology and the material sciences the happiness of humanity will not be secured. Man has no other resort than to strengthen his social relations on the basis of faith and virtue, and to save himself from the vortex of dangers with the guidance of a great world reformer, to establish a rule based on justice together with peace, security and sincerity. In this state of affairs, human society is moving quickly towards preparation for the rising up of the Imam of the Age (A.S.)

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The Length of al-Mahdi's Life

We believe that the lengthening of a man's life is not an impossibility, because it is explicitly said in the Qur'an that:

> *"We sent Nuh to his people, as he tarried among them a thousand years, all but fifty. " (XXIX; 14)*

What is more, research undertaken in the biological sciences has corroborated the possibility of lengthening the human life-span. Even great scientists are of the opinion that food and drugs may be prepared which can prolong man's life. The late Ayatullah Sadr (A learned scholar of Qom (1882-1953), father of the well-known Imam Musa-Sadr of the Lebanon.) in his book "al-Mahdi", quoted from a scientific article written in 1959 which stands as a witness to what we have said above. Here we shall give a summary of it. "Authoritative scientists say that all

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the basic tissues of the animal body can live forever, and it is possible for man to live for a thousand years, provided that it doesn't happen that the thread of his life is severed.

These scientists do not speak on the basis of guesswork or surmise, for they have arrived at their conclusion through scientific experiment. "A professor at Johns Hopkins University has said that it has been proved that the basic members of the human body have the potentiality for eternal life. Apparently the first person to carry out these experiments on parts of an animal's body was Dr. Jack Lubb, and after him Dr. Warren Lewis, who, together with his wife, proved that parts of bird foetuses could be kept alive in buffer solutions. These experiments were systematically continued until Dr. Alexis Karel, as a result of further experimental work, established that parts of animals subjected to experiments did not degenerate, and even that they lived longer than the animal from which they had been taken. In January 1912 he started his experiments and by dint of self-sacrifice and removing the numerous difficulties, he discovered the following facts: "

1. Unless complications such as lack of nutrition or attack by microbes intervened, living cells would continue living forever. 2. These cells which continued to live, also grew and multiplied. 3. The growth and division of these could be controlled by the nutrition given to them. 4. The passing of time did not affect them and did not make them age or lose strength. Not even the smallest effect of ageing was seen. Each year they grew and multiplied exactly as in previous years. So why does man die? Why is his span of life rarely more than a hundred years? The parts of the human or animal body are numerous and various, and there is also a perfect relationship and unity between them; so that the life of some of them depends on the life of others, and the failure or death of parts of human or animal bodies is the consequence of the death of the other parts. Sudden deaths which are the result of infection are for this reason, and it also provides the reason for the average limit of man's life being around seventy to eighty years.

Of course, what experiments have shown is that the cause of death is not the arrival at seventy or eighty years of age, but that the fundamental causes are diseases and accidents which may attack one of the body's organs and put it out of work; then the death of this part causes a break in its relation to other parts and the death of all the organs ensues. "Thus if science could eliminate these accidents or obstruct their harmful effects, there would be no impediment to the prolongation of life." So if we know that a greatly extended life is not an impossibility, there is no hindrance to prevent God, the All-powerful, from keeping a man safe and sound for thousands of years, because the regulations of a man's life is in the hands of God. He can bring a new harmony into existence which has precedence over the usual order of things, just as He did in the case of all the miracles.

The miracles of the prophets, the cooling of the fire for Ibrahim al-Khalil, the turning into a serpent of Hazrat Musa's staff, the bringing to life of the dead through Hazrat 'Isa, and so forth, are all against the usual flow of things, but God brought another order into existence by His own power and a miracle occurred;

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all Muslims, Jews and Christians, believe in miracles. Similarly for the length of the life of the Imam of the Age there remains no place for any kind of objection, because if someone says that such a length of life is impossible, his claim cannot be at all accepted after the stipulation of the Qur'an concerning the length of Hazrat Nuh's life, and also after the latest revelations of biology. If it is said that it is possible, but against the normal natural order of things, it can be retorted that the length of life of the Imam of the Age is against the natural order just as the miracles of the prophets, and is carried out according to the will of God. Someone who believes in the power of God and the occurrance of the miracles of the prophets cannot have the slightest objection to the length of the Imam's life.

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The Occultation of the Imam of the Age

The Prophet of Islam (S.A.) sometimes hinted to people concerning the occultation of the twelfth Imam, and the pure Imams (A.S.) also reminded people of this matter. The news of the occultation of the Imam of the Age was so well known even before his birth, that everyone who believed in the birth of the Imam also believed in his prolonged occultation. Let us look at some of the indications that have come down to us from many hadiths on this subject. 1. The Prophet said: "The Qa'im of my descendents will become hidden, as the result of a covenant between me and him, and then people will say that Allah has no need of the family of Muhammad, and some will doubt his birth. So everyone who is aware of his time must act according to his religion, and must not let Shaytan enter him by faltering lest he be thrown out from my people and my religion." 2. Amir al-Mu'minin said: "Our Qa'im has an occultation which will be of great devotion...

Beware! Everyone who is firm in his religion, and does not become hard-hearted from the lengthening of the occultation of this man (and turn away from his religion) will find himself in the same rank as me on the Day of Resurrection." Then he said: "Our Qa'im, when he rises, has no responsibility for anyone's allegiance to him, and for this reason his birth will be secret and he will be hidden." 3. Muhammad ibn Muslim said that he heard from Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (A.S.) that he said: "If you hear of the occultation of your Imam, do not deny it." 4. At-Tabarsi wrote: "The hadiths of the occultation were recorded by the Shi'ite narrators in books which were composed in the time of Imam Baqir and Imam Sadiq (A.S.). Of all these reliable narrators one was Hasan ibn Mahbub. About a hundred years before the time of the occultation, he wrote a book called "al-Mashyakhah," and mentioned the hadiths about the occultation in it.

The following is one of them. "Abu Basir said: "I said in the presence of Imam Sadiq (A.S.) that Hazrat Abu Ja'far had said: 'The Qa'im of the family of Muhammad will have two occultation; one prolonged, one short.' He said: 'Yes, O Abu Basir, one of those occultation will be longer than the other." Therefore, the Prophet of Islam (S.A.) and the pure Imams (A.S.) reminded people that the occultation of the Imam of the Age (A.S.) went together with the announcement of the existence of the Prophet himself, and that belief in the Imam's occultation went together with belief in the Prophet's existence. Shaykh Saduq narrated from

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Al-Sayyid al-Himyari: "I had some exaggerated idea about Muhammad ibn al-Hanafiyyah, and believed that he was hidden, till Allah enlightened me through Imam Sadiq and saved me from the Fire.
I was guided to the true way, whereby after the Imamate of Ja'far ibn Muhammad had been proved to me by evidence and demonstration, I said one day to him: 'O son of the Prophet of Allah, tell me some hadiths from your forefathers about occultation and the truth of it. If you please, I would that you tell me for whom the occultation is.' He replied: 'The occultation will occur for my descendent in the sixth generation, and he will be the twelfth Imam after the Prophet of Allah, the first one being 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, and the last the Qa'im of the Truth, the one who remains with Allah on earth, and the Lord of the Age...'"

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Why is the Imam of the Age in Concealment?

In previous lessons we have said that the existence of the Imam (A.S.) and the successor of the Prophet (S.A.) was necessary for a number of reasons, such as settling differences, explaining the laws of Allah, and giving spiritual, inward guidance, and that Allah, the Merciful, appointed Amir al-Mu'minin (A.S.) and after him eleven descendents, one after the other, as Imams after the Prophet of Islam. It is obvious that the duties of the Imam of the Age, in all the aspects of the Imamate, are the same as that of his predecessors. If there were no hindrance, it would be necessary that he be clearly manifested, so that people might prosper from all the benefits of his existence. So why was he hidden from the very first?
Basically, there is no need to look for the philosophy or reasons behind his occultation so as to believe in the rule of Allah, for there is no obligation on us to know the basic reason for it, just as we remain ignorant of the metaphysics behind many other things. It is sufficient that we know on the basis of the many hadiths and true Proofs that God, the All-Mighty, sent his own Proof, but that, for various reasons, He kept him hidden behind the curtain of occultation. It can also be found from some hadiths that the basic and fundamental reason for the occultation will become known after the appearance of al-Mahdi. 'Abdullah al-Fadl al-Hashimi says: "I heard from Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (A.S.) that he said: 'The occultation will be indispensible for the Lord of Power, so that the people of vanity will fall into doubt about him.' I asked: 'Why?' He said: 'For a reason which I am not at liberty to declare.' I asked: 'What will his rule be?'
He replied: 'The same rule as existed in the occultations of previous Proofs. It will not be disclosed until-after his appearance, just as the rule of the works of Khidr was not known (meaning the drilling of a hole in the boat, the killing of the youth, the repairing of the wall in the story of Khidr in the Qur'an) until Musa and Khidr decided to part company. O Fadl, the subject of the occultation is a command of Allah and a secret of His secrets, and since we acknowledge Allah to be Wise, we must accept that all his acts are done with Knowledge and Wisdom, even if the reason for them is not known to us.'" Of course the benefits of al-Mahdi's occultation can be discovered, and these have been indicated in some of the hadiths. For example:
1. A test for people is one of the benefits of the occultation of the Imam of the Age: on one side, a group without faith, whose inner feelings become evident; on

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the other side, those in the depths of whose hearts faith have taken root, their hope of deliverance, their patience in adversity, their faith in the unseen becoming more perfect, their worthiness becoming known, and degrees of spiritual reward falling to them. Musa ibn Ja'far (AS.) said: "When my fifth descendent becomes hidden, persevere in your religion, so that no one may turn you away from it. There will be an occultation for the Lord of that Age, when a group of believers in him will relinquish their belief. This occultation is a test by which Allah will test his slaves."

2. A Protection for the Imam against being killed: From a study of the leaders of Islam, and their situation vis-a-vis the Umayyad and Abbasid Caliphs, we can clearly see that if the twelfth Imam manifested himself they would surely kill him or poison him like his forefathers. Because when they heard and knew that there would arise from the family of the Prophet, from the descendents of 'Ali and Fatimah (A.S.) someone who would destroy the government of the oppressors, and that that person would be child of Hazrat Imam Hasan al-'Askari (A.S.), the Abassids planned to kill him. But Allah protected him and his enemies lost hope. Zurarah relates from Imam Sadiq (AS.) that he said: "There will be an occultation prior to the appearance of the Qa'im." Zurarah asked: "Why?" He said: "So that he may escape being killed, and that occultation will continue till the ground for his appearance and triumph over the rule of the oppressors is ready."

3. The third benefit that can be gleaned from the hadiths is that by this means al-Mahdi will be saved from having allegiance made to him by the oppressors, Caliphs, and usurping rulers. When he appears no one will swear allegiance to him, so that he can freely expose the truth and establish a just and righteous rule.

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The Purpose of the Hidden Imam.

We have said above that God appointed the Imam of the Age to be a guide amongst people; however it is the people who are the obstacle to his appearance, and whenever they are ready for a single, divine world rule, formed on true justice observing rights, truths and realities, putting into practice all the laws of Islam without any dissimulation or fear, al-Mahdi will openly declare himself. So, with regard to Allah, the Merciful, there is not the slightest lack of favour or mercy, for the fault lies with the people that the Imam is hidden and the appearance of his rule is delayed. Still, it must be remembered that the benefits of the existence of the Imam are not limited to outward guidance among people, for the pure existence of the Imam has other benefits which are not necessarily evident among people.

The most important benefit of the Imam's existence is that he is the intermediary for Divine Favor. For, one the basis of the evidence scholars have produced and also according to numerous hadiths which speak about the Imamate, if there were no Imam (a.s), the relation between the world and its creator would no longer exist, because all of the fovours of Allah come through the Imam to the rest of humanity. In many hadiths it is said very clearly that the earth will not remain without an Imam. The Imam is the heart of the world of existence, the leader, the preceptor of mankind, and for this reason his presence or his absence

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makes no difference. what is more, the spiritual guidance of the Imam towards worthy individuals will always be there, although they may not see him, especially as it is mentioned in hadiths that the Mahdi comes and goes in among the people in the meetings of the believers without anyone understanding. Thus the guarding of Islam and the protection of the worthy is well undertaken by the Imam, even during the time of his occultation. In reality the hidden Imam is like the sun behind a cloud from whose light and heat existent things may profit, although the ignorant and the blind may not see it. Imam Sadiq (a.s) also said in answer to the question: "
How can people benefit from a hidden Imam?": " Just as they do from the sun when it is behind a cloud." We would now like you to look at this excerpt from the that the shi'a sect is the only religion which maintains eternally the link of Divine guidance between God and his creation , and continually keeps alive the union of walayat, The Jewish religion, finished prophethood, which is the relationship between god and the world of man, with Moses, and do not acknowledge the prophethood of Jesus or Muhammad. Thus they have served this link , The Christians, also , stopped with Jesus, and the Sunni Muslims stood still with Muhammad. With the seal of prophethood among the latter, they admit of no further link being maintained between the Creator and creation. "Only the Shi'a faith believes that the prophethood ended with Muhammad, but that wilayat, which is this link of guidance and progression, continues to live after him and forever. "Indeed, only among the Shi'a does this reality between the world of man and the Divinity remain forever."

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A Necessary Reminder

Belief in the Imam of the Age means that the link between people and the unseen world is inseparable, and someone who believes this must always remember al-Mahdi and await the appearance of this hidden reformer. Of course, waiting for the Imam of the Age does not mean that all Muslims and Shi'as should fold their arms and take no measures in the way of furthering the aims of Islam, only waiting for him to appear. For as the great Shi'ite scholars have been saying from the earliest times, all Muslims and Shi'as have the duty to make every effort in the path of establishing and strengthening Islamic knowledge and laws in the face of injustice and evil, to struggle against this with all their possibilities; or, in other words, to strive till the preparation for a just rule has been made, till society has been so harmonised that all those with complaints have seen justice; and if there is any oppression or cruelty reigning among people, to protest against it, and continue in this way. Every Muslim has the duty to sacrifice himself in the way of Imam and Islam, and to always be prepared to welcome the promised al-Mahdi (A.S.), that is, to so order his life that it may not be a contradiction of the project of the Imam, so that he can take his place in the ranks behind him and fight against his enemies.

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(Roots of Religion, p. 217-235)

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